CALLING ATTENTION TO A MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE re. HUNGER STRIKE BY REMCO EMPLOYEES

Sri S. RAJAGOPAL (Kolar Gold Fields).—Sir, I beg to call the attention of the Minister for Transport and Tourism to the hunger strike by the employees of REMCO.

†Sri B. D. JATTI (Minister for Food).—Sir, the relationship between the management and employees of the REMCO Ltd., were quite cordial during the last many years. With a view to maintain harmonious relationship between the employees and the company and to prevent strikes a memorandum of settlement (Second Truce Agreement) was entered into with effect from 1st April 1962 valid for a period of 4 years. In consideration of this settlement the association agreed not to raise during the period of 4 years any dispute relating to the matters covered under this settlement or call for or declare a strike on any issue whatsoever.

In January 1965 the employees demanded for *'ad hoc'* allowances and also for reinstatement of one Inspector dismissed for insubordination. They resorted to stay-in-strike on these grounds from 19th January 1965. This was reported by the management to the Conciliation Officer. The Conciliation Officer negotiated a settlement, according to which the question of reinstatement of dismissed employee was dropped and the management was asked to consider without prejudice to the provision in the truce agreement, the question of grant of *'ad hoc'* allowances after six months in the light of the market conditions then prevailing and depending generally on the financial working at that time. The Association agreed not to resort to demonstration and protests of any kind. As regards disciplinary action against the employees who committed breach of discipline during the stay-in-strike, the employees association in their letter dated 9th February 1965 accepted that the employees had committed excesses and regretted and apologised for what happened. On these assurances of the Employees' Association, disciplinary proceedings were dropped.

The management considered the *'ad hoc'* question and they informed the Employees' Association that due to depressed conditions in the market it was not found possible to consider grant of *ad hoc* allowance in spite of managements best intentions.

The labour unrest manifested itself again in the factory when the mangement issued show-cause notices on 27th July 1965 to 11 workers of the Cables Division asking them to explain why a warning should not be administered for having left the factory premises without permission on 24th June 1965. The Employees' Association have reported that the said eleven workmen went to the Airport while on duty to give a send-off to one of the *officers* of the company, Sri Basavalingappa, Assistant Works Manager of the Cables Division. The management it appears had not objected to the previous similar occasions when the workmen had gone to the airport while on duty. All the workers of the Cables

Division started a tools down strike without any prior notice from 27th July 1965. The employees also did not relish the issue of notices to ten employees of the Cables Division who had contravened the notification issued by the management fixing the intervals for lunch and absented themselves work even during the period of work. The management issued these notices under the approved Standing Orders of the Company. On 27th July 1965 some of the employees tried to instigate other workmen of the Cables Division not to work and therefore the management framed charges against these workmen and communicated to employees on 28th July 1965. The tools down strike spread to all the sections of the factory with effect from 28th July 1965. The entire strength of the factory numbering about 1,200 workmen including 200 ladies participated in the strike. The workers were not justified in having resorted to a lightening sit-down strike spontaneously. They could have sought for relief in a constitutional way if they were aggrieved by the action of the management in having charge-sheeted workers who had abstained from work.

On 29th July 1965 the REMCO Employees' Association submitted a letter to the Commissioner of Labour requesting that conciliation proceedings may be taken up in respect of the following issues :—

1 Withdrawal of the issue of the show-cause notices to the employees;

2 Bonus for the year 1964-65;

3 *Ad hoc* allowances of Rs. 15 per months and

4 Wages for the period the workers are on tools-down strike.

Realising the seriousness of the situation the matter was immediately taken up for conciliation by the Deputy Labour Commissioner and notices of conciliation were issued to the parties fixing the first conciliation meeting on 30th July 1965. On this day both the parties, *viz.*, management representatives and the association representatives were present and after preliminary discussions the conciliation proceedings were adjourned for a later date. During of the first conciliation meeting, it was made clear to the representatatives of the workmen that they should first call off the tools-down strike and create a suitable atmosphere to enable the conciliation officer to negotiate a settlement.

The Association office bearers felt that it would be possible to induce the workers to discontinue the tools-down strike if the Conciliation Officer would make it convenient to address the workers and request them to discontinue the tools-down in view of the fact that their demands have been admitted in conciliation and were being examined. At this juncture the President and Secretary, REMCO Employees' Association wanted that Sri M. S. Krishnan, their legal adviser should also be allowed to speak to the workers inside the factory promises along with the Conciliation Officer. But the management were not prepared to allow Sri Krishnan who was not an office bearer of the above Association to enter the factory premises. The management however had no objection

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to Sri Krishnan meeting the workers and addressing them outside the factory premises. The employees were adamant that Sri Krishnan should be allowed to address the workers within the factory premises. On 1-8-1965 the Deputy Labour Commissioner and the Conciliation Officer addressed the workers of the REMCO and induced them to call off the strike and as a result of their pursuasion the workers called off the strike on 1-8-1965 and resumed normal work effect from 2-8-1965.

In the conciliation proceedings the Deputy Labour Commissioner pursued the four issues mentioned earlier. The stand taken by the management and the Employees' Association were not conducive for any agreement and therefore the Deputy Labour Commissioner submitted his failure report of the conciliation to the Government on 23 8 1965.

On 20-9 1965 the Commissioner of Labour sent his final report to the Government in this regard. The question of referring the dispute for adjudication is under consideration of Government.

Meanwhile the management finalised disciplinary proceedings in respect of Thirteen workmen and after finding them guilty, dismissed them from service. The management was inclined to drop the disciplinary proceedings if the employees regretted their action and gave letters of apology. The association made the letter of apology as issue for negotiation and prolonged the matter indefinitely. Since the disciplinary proceedings which had been completed could not be kept in abeyance without final orders, the management issued dismissal orders in respect of these thirteen employees without waiting for final reply from the employees' Association regarding submission of letters of apology from the workmen. Only recently on 18th January 1966, the REMCO Employees Association intimated the Government after personal discussions with the Secretary, L.M.A. Dept. that they are prepared to express regret in writing for the stay-in strike and that they are also willing to get such letters of regret from the employees concerned on a mutually acceptable draft of the letter provided the management agrees to reinstatement of the thirteen dismissed employees and drop enquiry proceedings against the rest of the 36 workmen.

It is not correct that disciplinary proceedings are pending against 36 workers as stated by the Association. Only Sixteen cases excluding those who were dismissed are pending with the management Out of these eight employees have since given letters of apology and in their cases disciplinary proceedings have been dropped.

The present agitation and hunger strike by the Association from 17th January 1966 is for the reinstatement of thirteen dismissed employees and for dropping disciplinary proceedings in respect of other cases. The Commissioner of Labour has reported that the Assistant Labour Commissioner, Bangalore Division, Bangalore, has fixed conciliation in this regard on 2nd January 1966.